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ABSTRACT

Successful School-to-Work (STW) practices and implementation needs were examined in New York's 401 rural school districts. A short survey was completed by administrators in 128 districts. Preliminary findings from the survey were discussed at four community roundtables attended by 95 representatives of rural school districts and their partners. A nomination form was distributed widely to identify promising practices, and site visits were conducted in four nominated districts. The findings are presented around the following themes: (1) greater emphasis was on STW issues among administrators than among parents, teachers, or the business community; (2) great disparities existed among rural schools in the involvement of teachers and parents in STW activities; (3) the need for increased involvement of businesses and employers was apparent; (4) most rural schools were only in the planning or early stages of implementation; (5) there was limited information on model programs; (6) problems involving long distances to business sites and lack of student transportation existed; and (7) there were needs for targeted STW funding at the district level and for state support and legislation recognizing the distinct challenges of rural districts. Promising practices are described in each of these areas, and recommendations are listed based on the same themes. Two approaches are outlined for providing technical assistance to rural STW programs. (SV)

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IMPLEMENTING SCHOOL-TO-WORK IN RURAL COUNTIES

A Statewide Survey Research Study
for the
Rural Education Advisory Committee

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Sullivan Educational Associates

May 1997

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Implementing School-to-Work in Rural Counties

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A Research and Development Project of
The Office of Professional Development
School of Education ★ Syracuse University

Administration/Coordination
S. Shablak, S. Trento

Primary Investigation
C. Sullivan, J. Sullivan, S. Trento

Project Management
T. Hansen

Data Analysis/Literature Study
K. Bator, L. Scafidi, S. Siegel

Technical Consultation
T. Hadlick, D. Haviland, B. Whitehill

Production and Design
C. Foster

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THE STUDY

"Implementing School-to-Work in Rural Counties" was commissioned by the Rural Education Advisory Committee (REAC). REAC was created in 1990 as a result of legislation sponsored by the Legislative Commission on Rural Resources. This Advisory Committee is a public/private collaborative body whose mission is to identify and disseminate information about rural education and to increase opportunities for rural students, families, and communities through the pursuit of excellence and equity for all rural students.

The Committee focuses its research upon school districts in rural areas of New York State. The Legislature has defined rural areas to include all communities within the 44 counties that have a population of less than 200,000 and within sparsely populated towns in larger counties. There are 401 rural school districts identified in New York State.

A Special Note to Everyone Who Participated in the Study

The findings of this study are a result of the energy and dedication found in our rural school districts. Many survey respondents, roundtable participants, and site personnel spent extra time with researchers to share detailed and important information. The study is a tribute to their spirit.

MEMBERS OF THE RURAL EDUCATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Charles H. Bohlen Jr., Chair
District Superintendent of Schools
Jefferson-Lewis-Hamilton-Herkimer-Oneida BOCES
20104 NYS Route 3
Watertown, NY 13601
315-788-0400 Fax 315-785-8300

James G. Hill
Business Development Representative
28 Woodstream Court
New Hartford, NY 13413
315-867-2550 (w) / 315-797-3279
Fax 315-866-9149

George F. Mack
Superintendent
Walton Central School District
20 Maple Avenue
Walton, NY 13856
607-865-4116 Fax 607-865-8568

Judith Duken, Director
Assistant Superintendent
Saratoga-Warren BOCES
112 Spring Street
Saratoga Springs, NY 12866
518-583-7939 Fax 518-583-4171

Michael Joseph Jr.
Executive Director
Rural Schools Program
114 Kennedy Hall
Cornell University
Ithaca, NY 14853-5901
607-255-7756 Fax 607-255-7905

ADVISORS

Mary Ann Awad
Information, Reporting & Technology Services Team
NYSED, Room 964 EBA
Albany, NY 12234
518-474-7965 Fax 518-474-4351

Lois Wilson
Director
NYS Senate Education Committee
Room 503 The Capitol
Albany, NY 12247
518-455-2631 Fax 518-426-6919

Ronald C. Brach
Executive Director
Legislative Commission on Rural Resources
Legislative Office Building
Albany, NY 12247
518-455-2544 Fax 518-426-6960

LEGISLATIVE COMMISSION ON RURAL RESOURCES

Senator Charles D. Cook, Chairman
Assemblyman William Magee, Vice Chairman

Senate Members: Mary Lou Rath
James W. Wright
Nancy Larraine Hoffmann

Assembly Members: Jacob E. Gunther III
Martin A. Luster
Patricia K. McGee
Chloe Ann O'Neil

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Section I

BACKGROUND AND METHODS

I-A Purpose of the Study

New York State is the recipient of the largest School-to-Work (STW) grant ($10 million) in the nation. It has the unique opportunity to become a national leader and model in planning and implementing. New York State's vision for its STW initiative is:

> *"To ensure that all high school graduates will be prepared for college, work, or both and will acquire the skills and knowledge needed for employment and effective citizenship."*

The phrase "all high school graduates" is generally understood to mean all graduating seniors regardless of their plans for postsecondary education or other attractive options. Yet, unless a significant dimension is added to the statewide School-to-Work initiative, many students will graduate lacking the skills essential to this vision. One important contributing factor may be the geographic location of their school: rural New York State.

It has been recognized nationally that there are inherent difficulties in implementing School-to-Work programs in rural areas.

A recent report, published by the Education Commission of the States (ECS), titled *Connecting Learning and Work: A Call to Action*, indicates:

> *"High expectations are needed for all students. Students who lack strong foundation skills will be at a major disadvantage over their lifetimes. Connecting learning and work seems to eliminate this disadvantage over their lifetimes. Serving students in rural areas is a particular challenge, requiring ingenuity and determination."*

Historically, School-to-Work programs had an urban focus simply because most of the private sector resources critical to success were located in urban centers. School-to-Work programs relied heavily on larger employers that had the flexibility to provide work based learning opportunities for students and teachers. As effective as these models were, they cannot be replicated in rural communities. Yet students in rural communities have the same needs for comprehensive, state-of-the-art programs and services as their urban counterparts. They also deserve equal opportunity to have their needs met.

The importance of serving rural areas with School-to-Work programs, both nationally and on the statewide level, can be seen, however, by observing how extensive our rural population actually is:

- ★ About 60% of our nation's school districts are rural
- ★ 75% of those students live in towns with fewer than 2,500 residents (Spicker, 1992)
- ★ In New York State, there are 44 rural counties
- ★ These 44 rural counties represent over 401 rural school districts, nearly 60% of the state's total

Therefore, this study has several purposes:

- ★ to inform REAC of the current state of affairs regarding the preparation of rural students for a life of learning and work;
- ★ to identify strategies and approaches that can be used to raise expectations for all rural students;
- ★ to assist rural schools in providing strong academic preparation for all students;
- ★ to help all students prepare for both college and the workplace, and provide students with opportunities to develop applicable workforce skills;
- ★ and finally, to make recommendations for technical assistance to rural schools to stimulate development of School-to-Work programs.

Many of the challenges in implementing School-to-Work are common to both rural and urban schools. In this study, care has been taken to address the distinct qualities of rural schools that influence curriculum design and implementation, including the facts that:

- ★ rural schools are more influenced by economic and cultural outlooks of their communities than other schools;
- ★ rural schools reflect and shape the economic and social stratification of their communities;
- ★ rural schools embody pride in values, including discipline and hard work;
- ★ rural schools serve as more than just classrooms; they are cultural and social centers of small towns and rural communities;
- ★ rural schools are often the primary link between the community and the world.

I-B Major Questions Addressed in the Study

In the fall of 1996 the Rural Education Advisory Committee (REAC) commissioned the Office of Professional Development: School of Education at Syracuse University, and Sullivan Educational Associates to work in collaboration to examine current School-to-Work efforts in those counties that New York State has defined in statute as being in whole or part "rural."

All rural districts in the 44 rural counties were invited to participate in the study. Included were those rural communities that have been funded or have applied for School-to-Work implementation and planning grants. Critical to the success of the study was the involvement of schools, superintendents, district superintendents, and the collaborators in business, industry, and government.

To provide REAC with the information necessary to develop strategies and approaches to address the goals of the project, the following major questions were identified:

Demographics

- ★ What is the level of implementation of School-to-Work in rural communities?
- ★ What percentages of teaching staff grades K–6 are involved in School-to-Work?
- ★ What percentages of teaching staff grades 7–12 are involved in School-to-Work?
- ★ What is the level of emphasis placed on School-to-Work by the business community, parents, administrators, and teachers?
- ★ What employment/educational options are being selected by students following graduation?
- ★ What is the level of activity in school based, work based, and connecting practices?

Issues/Recommendations

- ★ What suggestions and recommendations are stakeholders in rural communities making to address issues such as transportation?
- ★ What models currently under development in rural communities hold the most promise?
- ★ What type of assistance is needed to further School-to-Work in rural communities?

I-C The Study Approach

A sequence of activities was used to meet the goals of this project:

★ A search of the literature, including current and proposed practices and statutes, as well as national, state, and local initiatives designed to meet the needs of rural youth, and resources available to provide comprehensive School-to-Work programs for youth in rural areas.

★ Interviews with key personnel at the federal, state, and local level identified as individuals who have demonstrated success in School-to-Work programs for rural youth or who can provide policy guidance for this project.

★ Development of a small advisory group, including: participation from interested members of REAC, state leaders, and policy makers; parents and students; schools, school districts, and communities; colleges, universities, and community colleges; and employees, employers, and business leaders knowledgeable about issues related to School-to-Work in rural areas, to discuss:

- governance, policy, procedure, finance
- curriculum and assessment linking School-to-Work
- staff development
- public relations and communication
- partnerships with employers
- technical and professional training

★ Development, administration, and evaluation of a survey instrument with the advice of the advisory group designed to meet the goals of the project for the proposed target population.

★ On-site visits to local successful programs identified by participants.

★ Completion of four rural community roundtables to review the findings from the survey and make recommendations to REAC.

★ Development of a final report using data from both the survey and roundtables to identify and examine traditional road blocks to change in rural School-to-Work programs and to discuss strategies to increase and improve School-to-Work programs in rural areas.

★ Completion of presentation materials available for REAC to use with constituents, state agencies, the Legislature, and the School-to-Work Council.

Supporting documents for these activities can be found in the Appendix. These documents include:

I. Charts and Graphs
II. Communications
III. Surveys
IV. Data Gathering Activities
V. Lists
VI. Bibliography

Section II

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

II-A Data Gathering and Analysis

(See Appendix IV for instruments and reports)

1. The Research Instrument

A four-page "10-minute" survey was designed after consulting with REAC, higher education specialists, and School-to-Work partnership coordinators. A statewide advisory group, composed of representatives from schools, higher education, business, and government, met and consulted with the design team throughout. The main objective was to create an accurate and consistent instrument for receiving the greatest amount of pertinent School-to-Work information in the least amount of time. Focus areas included: demographics, issues and efforts, and specifics on School-to-Work activities. Written, fill-in, and multiple choice Likert Scale questions were included. After pretesting, the ten-question survey was sent to BOCES district superintendents for forwarding to all (401) rural school superintendents.

Letters of instruction accompanied communications to BOCES and school superintendents. School superintendents were given the option to fill out the survey or to designate an appropriate person to do so. A total of 128 surveys were returned (32%) from a statewide representation.

2. The Roundtables

A series of Community Roundtables, sponsored by School-to-Work partnerships or consortiums – Adirondack, Delaware-Chenango-Madison-Otsego, Genesee-Livingston-Orleans-Wyoming (GLOW), and Ulster County – were held in four regions of the state and attended by 95 participants representing school districts and their partners. They were intended to provide maximum opportunity for local practitioners to share their knowledge and insights on the status of School-to-Work needs and services in rural communities. Introductions were made by a REAC member, School-to-Work partnerships, or the local BOCES.

A series of questions were raised based on preliminary survey findings: 1) Are the preliminary findings consistent with your experience working in the field? 2) Are there findings which are not consistent with your experience and therefore should be eliminated? 3) Are there findings which, in your experience, are not on the list, but should be added to the list? 4) Are there changes or

modifications to the wording of the preliminary findings which, in your judgment, would provide a more accurate or a more thorough representation of the findings?

After a review of the preliminary findings by the study team, participants organized into small groups to discuss specific recommendations regarding individual findings. Probing questions, such as the rationale for the recommendations, strategies that will ensure success, who needs to be involved, potential barriers, and measurement for success were discussed.

3. Model Programs – "Promising Practices"

To identify local programs that were successful in addressing the school-to-work needs of youth in rural schools a combination of recommendations were used. One was a nomination form, "Promising Practices," that was reviewed by the advisory group. Based on their recommendations, the form was distributed widely to identify "Promising Practices."

Visits to selected "Promising Practices" followed: a) to gather more in-depth information about the school-to-work needs of youth in rural areas; b) to discuss firsthand with practitioners the types of activities and services which are having a positive impact on meeting student needs; and c) to develop a series of program descriptions to share with schools, their partners, parents, and other interested individuals and agencies. The sites visited were: Ulster County BOCES, Mohonasen Central School District (Schenectady County), Newark Central School District (Wayne County), and Lake Placid Central School District (Essex County).

4. The Array of Survey Data

In the Appendix, all the survey data is presented in a series of charts, graphs, and listings which best illustrate the study findings. It was analyzed to provide:

★ **Demographic Information**
- characteristics of survey respondents
- district size
- size of graduating classes
- employment/educational options selected by students following graduation
- distances from urban areas

★ **Current Issues and Efforts**
- level of implementation of School-to-Work
- percentages of teaching staff grades K–6 involved in School-to-Work

- percentages of teaching staff grades 7–12 involved in School-to-Work
- level of emphasis placed on School-to-Work by business community, parents, administrators, and teachers

★ **Suggestions and Recommendations** for:

- issues such as distance from businesses
- which models hold the most promise
- types of assistance needed to further School-to-Work in rural communities

★ **Information** on:

- the level of implementation of specific school based, work based, and connecting activities at the K–6 and 7–12 levels

II-B Major Findings

Findings

Survey responses and roundtable discussion findings were analyzed and blended into several common themes that follow. Each reflects the findings of both initiatives and validates them by providing summary statements upon which the recommendations are based. A need for increased technical assistance is emphasized throughout the findings. The findings for Implementing School-to-Work in Rural Counties divide themselves into three broad areas:

A) KEY PLAYERS

The three groups identified as the most influential participants in School-to-Work programs are administrators, teachers and parents, and businesses.

B) IMPLEMENTATION

Implementation was a major focus because schools must move beyond the planning or beginning stages of School-to-Work programs to receive the full benefits of the initiative.

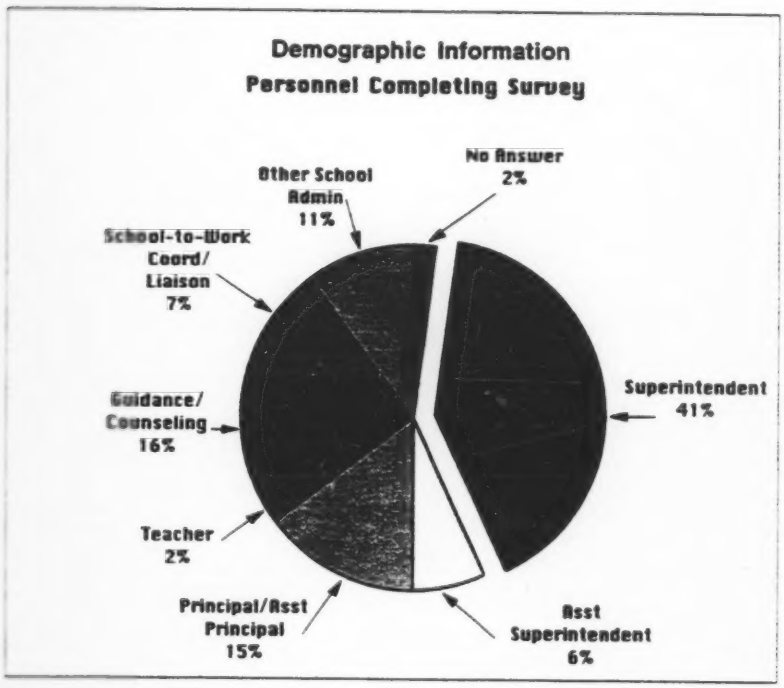
C) DISTANCE AND CHANGE

The surveys revealed that the issue of distances to businesses was a major consideration for the success of School-to-Work programs in rural areas. Change was supported by new ideas.

A – KEY PLAYERS

1. Administrative Emphasis

Administrators currently place a higher degree of emphasis on School-to-Work issues than parents, teachers, and the business community does.



★ Superintendents designated appropriate survey respondents and of those responding, 73% were administrators.

★ 41% of the responding administrators were superintendents who chose to invest their own time in the survey.

What The Surveys Said About School-to-Work:

"More information and opportunities need to be provided."

"Provide assistance to 'regular education teachers' so they can incorporate general employment skills."

"We are just beginning and need help in all areas."

In addition, the Surveys and Roundtables told us:

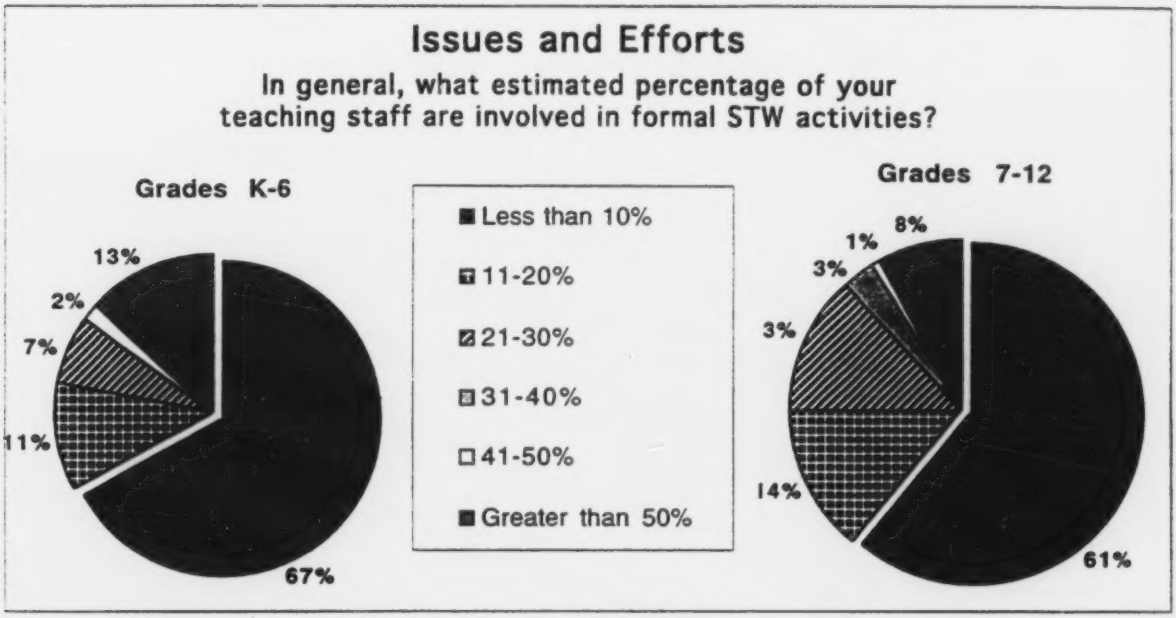
- Activities should be implemented to increase the awareness and knowledge of all sectors of the school and local community. Particular efforts should be targeted towards expanding the involvement and participation of the teaching staff, parents, and school board members within the school community.
- Specific activities designed to increase the awareness and understanding of the greater community in rural areas should be developed to increase dialogue and participation by community members in School-to-Work.

And the "Promising Practices" (Site Visitations and Research) told us:

- "Key leaders – administrators – must have a clear vision for School-to-Work reforms in order to create a school culture in which all staff understand and share a common vision and to determine appropriate professional opportunities." *(Pathways to School Improvement – School-to-Work Transition WebPage)*
- "Administrators should identify the program that is appropriate for their school or choose a program that can be adapted to suit the local conditions." *(Pathways to School Improvement – School-to-Work Transition WebPage)*
- "Administrators should collaborate with local businesses to develop the work based learning programs." *(Pathways to School Improvement – School-to-Work Transition WebPage)*
- Administrators stressed that School-to-Work should be for all students.

2. Teacher and Parent Participation

Great variations exist among rural schools in the involvement of K–12 teaching staff in formal School-to-Work activities. This disparity extends to parent participation also.



★ Almost 2/3 of all schools report that less than 10% of their staff is involved in formal School-to-Work activities.

★ More than 67% of K–6 schools have less than 10% of their staff involved in formal School-to-Work activities.

★ Nearly 70% of schools report that parents place low emphasis on School-to-Work issues.

What The Surveys Said About School-to-Work:

"Get parents informed."

"Create employment environments within the school. Appoint specific individual to full-time leadership role."

"With teachers, we stressed the integration of courses into this program and how they fit into the School-to-Work scheme."

"Train staff to return as turnkeys to demonstrate how academic subjects and work relate."

In addition, the Surveys and Roundtables told us:

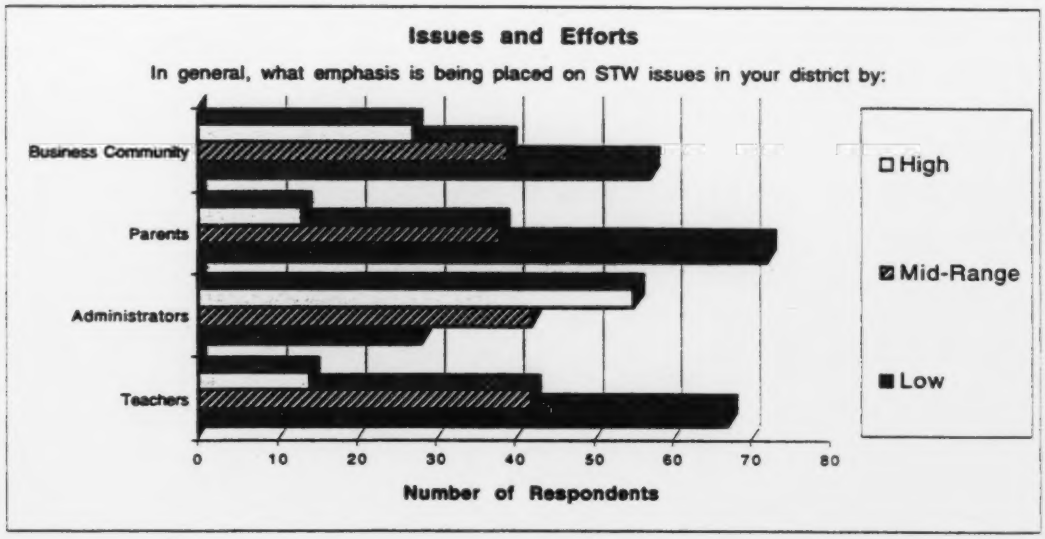
- Activities should be directed towards increasing the awareness and knowledge of teaching staff about School-to-Work. Staff development activities should be designed and implemented with full participation and input from teachers, and where appropriate, through existing mechanisms such as shared decision making teams in school.
- Opportunities such as internships or job-shadowing arrangements should be created for teachers to experience firsthand the types of skills, knowledge, and attitudes students need to be successful in various careers.
- Guidance, training, and resource materials that link new Regents graduation requirements and initiatives for higher standards with School-to-Work should be provided to teachers.
- Teachers should be provided information and materials for integrating School-to-Work into existing classes and coursework. Staff development and training activities provided by teachers centers, School-to-Work partnerships, BOCES, and districts should include practical and proven methods for aligning the goals of School-to-Work with academic instruction.

And the "Promising Practices" (Site Visitations and Research) told us:

- Several sites stressed the need for teacher retraining to connect academic instruction with what is occurring in the modern workplace. Newark CSD cited an "exchange" day as successful in which teachers visited area businesses and business people visited schools. Mohonasen CSD has worked with teachers to develop alternative courses and sequences, such as Med-Tech.
- "Vocational and academic teachers, counselors, and administrators will have systematic and consistent opportunities to develop a working understanding of School-to-Work principles and become familiar with the best implementation strategies through appropriate preservice and inservice preparation. At the same time, staff will have opportunities to develop leadership..." *(Pathways to School Improvement – School-to-Work Transition WebPage)*
- "Provide teachers and counselors with opportunities to understand their roles in School-to-Work programs." *(Pathways to School Improvement – School-to-Work Transition WebPage)*
- Several program administrators recommended that schools needed to develop a "bank" of people willing to serve as mentors for students.
- Recent proposals submitted to teachers centers for School-to-Work initiatives frequently requested funding to train parents.
- "A Public Agenda poll conducted in the summer of 1995 indicates that three times as many parents believe that good grades come from hard work rather than being born with strong intellectual abilities. The trick is to translate these attitude shifts into action." *(Murnane and Levy, 82)*
- "Parent-teacher-administrator teams with greater autonomy concerning use of resources play a key role in bringing about change." *(Murnane and Levy, 83)*

3. Business Involvement

Increased involvement of business and employers, particularly small businesses, connecting communities to School-to-Work, is critical to increased collaboration and employment opportunities for students.



★ There is great variation among schools and businesses in the development of relationships and partnerships in the community.

★ The involvement of business is one of the best ways to get communities connected to School-to-Work.

What The Surveys Said About School-to-Work:

"We need to assess and identify local School-to-Work partnerships, no matter what the size of the business or industry."

"If business representatives would be willing to come into the school, their knowledge would be put to extensive use by many teachers."

"Encourage businesses that schools use or buy from to become involved."

"There are many 'mom and pop' and small businesses which are able to shadow, mentor, or intern students in rural areas."

In addition, the Surveys and Roundtables told us:

- The State Legislature should provide tax incentives to promote increased involvement of businesses in School-to-Work initiatives.
- Increased information should be provided to businesses and employers to create greater awareness of the goals of School-to-Work and the types of activities available in which businesses could support School-to-Work.
- School districts and their partners should contact local business groups and organizations such as Chambers of Commerce and rural businesses and professional associations to increase their knowledge and awareness of School-to-Work, as well as enlisting their support for expanding School-to-Work opportunities and experiences for students.
- Strategies should be developed and implemented to include small businesses located in rural communities to become active partners in School-to-Work. Barriers, such as liability or workers compensation, should be specifically addressed in order to stimulate small business participation in rural areas.

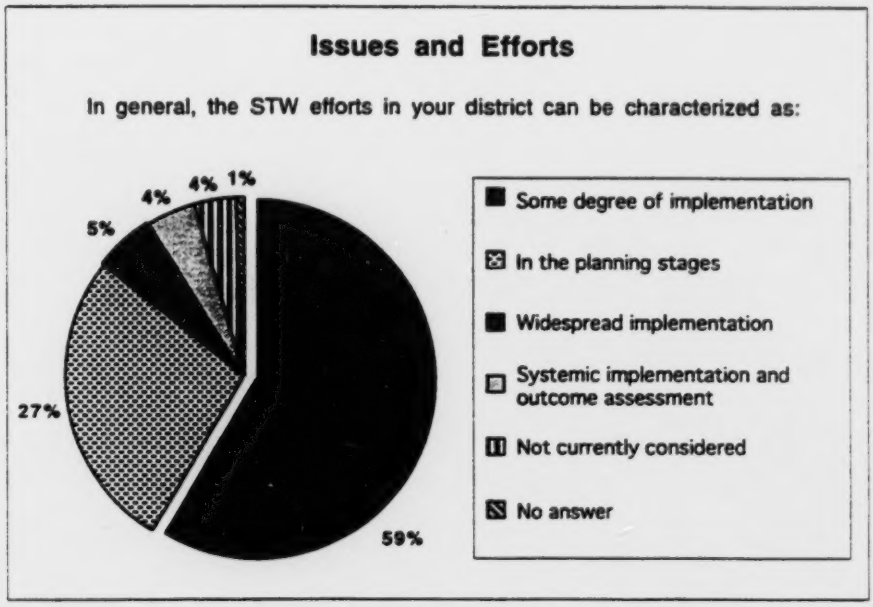
And the "Promising Practices" (Site Visitations and Research) told us:

- The superintendent and the work experience coordinator of Newark CSD both stressed the importance of a philosophical commitment of working closely with, and involving the business community in school district issues. They recognized business participation and help through a year-end recognition activity which included parents, teachers, and businesses.
- "Develop partnerships with local industry to learn about all aspects of the industry, including planning, management, finance, technical, and production skills, underlying principles of technology, labor and community issues, and health, safety, and environmental issues." *(Pathways to School Improvement – School-to-Work Transition WebPage)*

B – IMPLEMENTATION

4. Level of Implementation

The majority of rural schools report that they are in the beginning stages of implementation.



★ Only 9% of the surveys indicated that School-to-Work was widespread or systemic.

★ More than 86% of the surveys noted that their schools were in School-to-Work planning stages or in some degree of implementation.

What The Surveys Said About School-to-Work:

"Just beginning. Has been a 'no priority' item."

"We are currently trying to organize and formalize what we are currently doing so we can add the missing pieces."

"We are not currently involved in any formal School-to-Work program, although we do have some School-to-Work activities in our school district."

"We are only beginning to craft a vision. Transferable skills and strategies need to be woven into already existing courses and connections made between that work and the world outside our school."

In addition, the Surveys and Roundtables told us:

- Rural school districts should be provided continued and sustained support to move School-to-Work initiatives from the initial planning stages to considerable implementation.
- Primary areas where support and technical assistance are needed include: expanding awareness of School-to-Work within the school and local community; identifying and overcoming barriers created by geographic distance of most rural communities from business development; and training and materials for integrating School-to-Work with existing curriculum and education, including the new Regents graduation requirements.
- Sharing of model programs, including implementation strategies and successful practices that have been implemented in rural schools, is a key activity in increasing the ability of rural schools to move towards full implementation for all grades. Implementation is considerably higher at the 7–12 level than at the K–6 level.

And the "Promising Practices" (Site Visitations and Research) told us:

- The successful programs spent considerable time in organizing their efforts before full-scale implementation. Both Mohonasen CSD and Newark CSD started small and expanded only after developing a "track record" of working closely with employers to ensure quality experiences for both the student and employer.
- Ulster BOCES expanded work experience sites based upon positive feedback from an initial limited number of sites.
- "Communication is the main key in getting commitment and involvement by all the stockholders in the initiative. We gave presentations to the PTA, Rotary, Kiwanis, Board of Education, and the faculty to show the benefits of the School-to-Work program and how they fit in." *(Mt. Morris SD-Model Program response to questionnaire)*
- "As School-to-Work initiatives move from the planning stages to full implementation across the nation, professional development will play an essential role. School leaders can use professional development programs to communicate a shared vision of School-to-Work reforms and provide access to the skills needed to support those reforms." *(Pathways to School Improvement – School-to-Work Transition WebPage)*

5. Model Programs

Information on model programs is limited and schools expressed a real need to increase their knowledge of both model programs and successful services statewide and nationally.

- ★ Only 13 specific district model programs were identified from 128 surveys.
- ★ A total of eight specific activities or programs were identified.
- ★ 51 of the responding districts did not know of any model efforts.
- ★ 24 districts felt that regional clearinghouses could be most helpful by sharing information and successful practices.

What The Surveys Said About School-to-Work:

"I am not familiar with rural School-to-Work efforts outside our region at this time. Inside our region, for example, school districts are at about the same stage in the School-to-Work efforts."

"We need help. Viewing a model program that is working in a rural setting would be a good start."

"We would like improved communication of successful models."

In addition, the Surveys and Roundtables told us:

- Regional and local workshops should be held with presentations by rural school districts that have been successful in establishing components of School-to-Work. Specific models or approaches that address key issues such as overcoming barriers of geographic distance, expanding business involvement, and increasing teacher participation should be highlighted.
- Resource guides and materials should be developed and distributed to rural schools describing innovative models and practices and identifying key contact people for further information.
- Incentives should be provided to model programs to develop information and materials describing the programs and to compensate for expenses related to the provision of technical assistance to other districts and presentations and participation in related staff development activities.

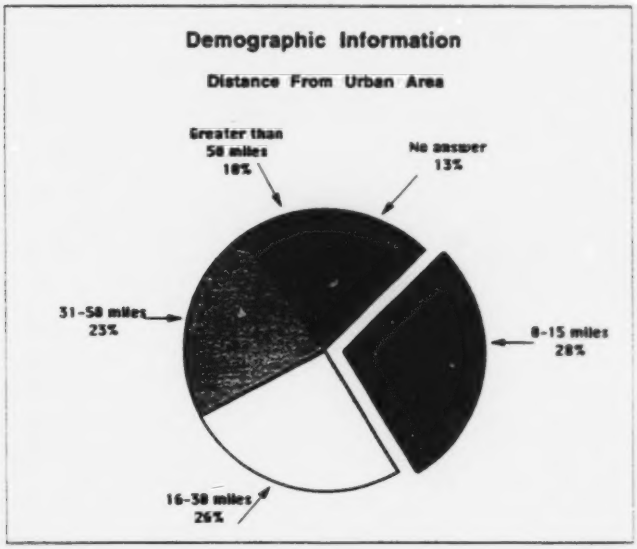
And the "Promising Practices" (Site Visitations and Research) told us:

- "Administrators should become familiar with the wide variety of program options for work based learning. They should evaluate the key characteristics of each option for work based learning. They should evaluate the key characteristics of each option in terms of its appropriateness for the needs of the students, the context of the school, and the available workplace and employment opportunities. Sometimes key elements of different programs can be combined to establish a work based learning program." *(Pathways to School Improvement – School-to-Work Transition WebPage)*
- "Promising Practices" sites should share strategies with other schools to "assist in any way," e.g., New Visions, Ulster BOCES.

C – DISTANCE AND CHANGE

6. Geographic Distance

Geographic distance from business sites and adequate transportation for students were major barriers affecting the provision of a broad range of work-related activities.



★ Travel time for more than 1/3 of reporting schools to urban/suburban areas was at least half an hour.

★ More information on creative approaches to School-to-Work, such as flexible scheduling, expanding liability coverage, and local mentorships was needed.

WHAT THE SURVEYS SAID ABOUT SCHOOL-TO-WORK:

"Provide transportation to job sites. Maybe do shared services with neighboring districts for transportation."

"We must provide alternatives to transportation, e.g., in-house entrepreneurship opportunities, mentoring programs."

"Use existing transportation networks for those who cannot drive.

"We try to place students in the vicinity as much as possible; however, when that is not possible, we set up carpools for those students."

"The Board of Education and the administration are very supportive when it comes to setting up field trips into Rochester, just as long as they are within the school day timeframe."

In addition, the Surveys and Roundtables told us:

- School districts should explore opportunities for expanding participation to small, locally based businesses and employers in School-to-Work.
- School based activities, such as bringing business people into the schools, job mentoring through electronic connections, and distance learning, should be increased where geographic distance is a major barrier for School-to-Work.
- School based entrepreneurial activities that address local community needs and provide viable School-to-Work experiences for students should be considered.
- School districts should establish contacts with local and regional agencies and, where appropriate, develop agreements for providing transportation for School-to-Work activities.
- School districts should develop School-to-Work experiences for students in the district, including job shadowing, work experiences, mentoring by district administrators and teaching staff.
- Regional transportation resource guides should be prepared and distributed to rural districts. The guides should include information on how to use existing school resources for providing transportation as well as information on other providers and transportation networks within the region.

And the "Promising Practices" (Site Visitations and Research) told us:

- "The effective use of technology 'evens the playing field' between rural and urban or suburban communities by ensuring that students in rural areas have equal access to a wealth of information and opportunities. Organizations such as the National Rural and Small Schools Network and the National Rural Education Association provide educators, administrators, and staff an opportunity to exchange information with other small and rural schools." *(National School-to-Work Internet Gateway)*
- "Teachers, administrators, and parents all have personal networks within the business community that School-to-Work practitioners have called upon to involve small businesses. Cultivating these connections builds a sense of community and encourages a culture of participation, which gradually may assume momentum, attracting other small businesses into the system." *(National School-to-Work Internet Gateway)*
- "When appropriate, use distance education to bring information to staff. It is essential to select the most appropriate mode of delivery to meet the objectives of local staff development programs." *(Faulkner and Finch, Pathways to School Improvement – School-to-Work Transition WebPage)*
- "In Rothsay, Minnesota, a community's drive to save its independent school system and its business spurred the school board to purchase and reopen the closed hardware store, replacing the high school's business simulation class with the opportunity to run a real business." *(National School-to-Work Internet Gateway)*

7. Change: Funding, Policy, and Planning

The need for targeted School-to-Work funding at the district level to initiate and sustain School-to-Work implementation and continuation was frequently expressed. Also indicated was the need for support and legislation that recognized the distinct characteristics and challenges of rural districts.

- ★ 24 districts said additional funding support was necessary to increase staff for School-to-Work programming.
- ★ 50 districts identified greater funding as the way for the legislature to provide the most assistance.
- ★ 12 districts said it was important that the legislature provide flexibility in implementing School-to-Work programming.

What The Surveys Said About School-to-Work:

On Transportation:

"We need more money for transportation. The students are interested in internships, but many do not have transportation."

"Student car transportation should be considered acceptable and insured."

"Provide funding and change in legislation to allow for informal transportation."

On Staff:

"We do not have the staff or support to implement at the present time, to the extent necessary to carry out the program."

"School-to-Work is another add-on. It is significant, but if it has not been a part of our culture, it is an add-on. We need financial support to increase staff time to craft curriculum and resources."

"Having an individual who could make community contacts and facilitate the program within our building would be helpful."

continued

On Flexibility and Uniqueness:

"No policies or regulations should be enacted without corresponding long-term support. Small rural schools are overextended. We do not have the resources, human or fiscal, to absorb unfunded mandates."

"As a small city in a rural area, the opportunities we can provide do not equal those in larger cities. Funds should be targeted to help level the playing field."

"Liability issues seem to be a concern, especially for small businesses."

"Make funding flexible so a school could use it for curriculum integration or work based learning opportunities."

In addition, the Surveys and Roundtables told us:

- Funding should be provided at the school district level to ensure the establishment and implementation of School-to-Work in rural areas. Funding should be categorical and targeted to specific School-to-Work needs including: coordination of School-to-Work activities within the district, transportation of students to School-to-Work work experiences, and staff development and training.
- Tax incentives should be provided to businesses through state legislation to expand participation and promote increased involvement.
- Strategies and alternatives for continuing School-to-Work initiatives, after federal funding ceases, need to be addressed, and guidance should be provided for institutionalizing School-to-Work in local areas.

And the "Promising Practices" (Site Visitations and Research) told us:

- "A recent National Governors Association survey reports that 13 states are considering or planning to authorize a state tax credit for wages paid to School-to-Work participants, and nine states are considering or planning to authorize a tax credit for the cost of training School-to-Work participants." *(National School-to-Work Internet Gateway)*
- An organizational mission statement—one that truly reflects the deep shared vision and values of everyone within that organization—creates a great unity and tremendous commitment.
- "We took three months at the beginning of our planning period and struggled through strategic planning. It has made all the difference in the world. We have an active executive committee." *(Bob Bone, Cayuga-Onondaga BOCES)*

- "The Board of Education passed a resolution supporting School-to-Work initiatives. The superintendent, as one of his Performance Benchmarks, has made School-to-Work initiative a priority. Principals have been assembled in a workshop. Teachers are involved in creating curriculum. Employers are on committees. The involvement is throughout the district." *(Donald Gensburg, Rochester City School District)*

Section III

IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations for this study are based on the analysis of the findings, and the advice of the study's statewide advisory group and the New York State School-to-Work Advisory Council. The next phase of the study will be to apply the best technical assistance available to meet the needs of rural communities as understood through the study and as expressed in the following recommendations:

1. ***Because administrators in general are the persons in rural schools who currently place a higher degree of emphasis on School-to-Work issues than parents, teachers, and the business community:***

A. Administrators should be provided with:

- the best School-to-Work public relations information available including actual presentations with overheads and follow-up materials, as well as sample news releases that inform and commit school personnel, parents, business, and the community.
- School-to-Work/CDOS videotapes to better inform faculty and the community.
- effective and attractive COSER options to support and encourage regional and local School-to-Work staff development.

Liaisons should be provided with:

- first-rate materials to assist administrators in their collaboration with their faculties, including basic School-to-Work awareness, activities, etc.
- user-friendly training materials to move school leaders forward from awareness to inclusion to institutionalization of School-to-Work.

Rural teachers and other school personnel should be provided with:

- training in the use of electronic resources, especially the internet, for cutting-edge information

on model programs, the leading expertise, funding opportunities, clearinghouses, NYSED, and the many available web sites.

- knowledge about the variety of "community tools" resource lists available.

B. Enabling Policy should:

- encourage all funded School-to-Work projects to provide interregional information.
- link all NYS School-to-Work administrative organizations with the commissioner.

2. ***Because great disparities exist among rural schools in the involvement of K–12 teaching staff and parent participation in formal School-to-Work activities:***

A. Administrators should be provided with:

- supporting resources for training and professional development workshops, courses, and mailings for teacher centers and BOCES staff development units; particularly important are materials that integrate School-to-Work instruction and CDOS into the curriculum, and assess School-to-Work student outcomes.
- guidelines that assist schools in establishing opportunities for job shadowing in multiple small and large businesses.
- creative options like vacation time internships within regional businesses, which are paid for jointly through businesses, grants, and/or parts of SED/School-to-Work project funding.

Liaisons should be provided with:

- information on promising statewide School-to-Work models through SED websites, regional workshops, and literature dissemination.
- information resources and School-to-Work leadership training for elementary and secondary school guidance counselors.
- turnkey School-to-Work training for parents.

Rural Teachers and other school personnel should be provided with:

- leadership training to inform and promote School-to-Work discussions to regional and local parent groups, as well as to cooperative extension units.

B. Enabling Policy should:

- provide incentives for teachers by recognizing statewide models and the leadership behind them.
- require that all School-to-Work grantees share their funded projects with other schools at a conference or at organized showcases.
- create a formal partnership with the Teachers' Center component of SED and provide support for all centers to offer School-to-Work programming.
- work with the NYS teachers associations to create action plans for aligning School-to-Work with the NYS Standards.

3. *Because increased involvement of business and employers, particularly small business, is critical to increased collaboration and employment opportunities for students:*

A. Administrators should be provided with:

- initiatives that reach out to businesses through the media, chambers of commerce, local public television, and community forums.
- plans to assist employers in developing school based and work based learning components.
- connections for rural business leaders to network with successful School-to-Work business leaders throughout the state.
- opportunities to showcase outstanding BOCES occupational education model partnerships including occupational preparation faculty and students, the local college, and specific industry.

Liaisons should be provided with:

- specific tools for schools to work productively with businesses.
- connections to strong networks among small companies in rural areas.

Rural teachers and other school personnel should be provided with:

- model guidelines for businesses underwriting School-to-Work initiatives.

B. Enabling Policy should:

- find ways to provide tax incentives for School-to-Work partners.

- create special variances for constricting barriers.
- establish formal rural school relationships through the NYS School-to-Work Council.

4. *Because the majority of rural schools report that they are in the beginning stages of implementation:*

A. Administrators should be provided with:

- guidelines and enthusiasm for increasing levels of implementation through BOCES, regional partnerships, and other leading resources.
- directions for organizing regional workshops highlighting benchmark districts and various levels of implementation.
- a focus to reinforce the integrative nature of School-to-Work as opposed to the series of events approach.
- boilerplate articles to plug into local district news via newsletters, local papers, parent-teacher organizations, communications, etc.

Liaisons should be provided with:

- materials and training for the development and integration of applied learning curricula at elementary and secondary levels.
- enhanced instruction for counselors through BOCES regarding career majors.
- guidelines for schools on strategies to promote School-to-Work to school boards, parents, and other stakeholders in the educational process.

Rural teachers and other school personnel should be provided with:

- materials to convincingly promote School-to-Work to kindergarten parents.
- linkages to local college education faculty to create integrative classroom activities.

B. Enabling Policy should:

- support professional development and training that reflects progressive implementation.
- reward outstanding initiatives.

5. ***Because information on model programs is limited and schools expressed a real need to increase their knowledge of both model programs and successful services statewide and nationally:***

A. Administrators should be provided with:

- an array of resources on the best model programs.

Liaisons should be provided with:

- assistance to design individual and regional School-to-Work databases and user-friendly access to them for educational planning, training, and matching.

Rural teachers and other school personnel should be provided with:

- exemplary practices from model programs to apply in their own schools.

B. Enabling Policy should:

- encourage the growth and awareness of model programs through validation.

6. ***Because geographic distance from business sites and adequate transportation for students were major barriers affecting the provision of a broad range of work-related activities:***

A. Administrators should be provided with:

- multiple transportation options, including using school buses for School-to-Work activities between 9:30 am and 2:00 pm.
- busing for School-to-Work activities during summers and vacations.
- comprehensive region-wide transportation networks.
- the development and operation of broad regional clearinghouses and support networks.

Liaisons should be provided with:

- technology for the dissemination of School-to-Work information and instruction, and for development of interactive electronic mail conversations among students and business communities.

- traveling School-to-Work seminars to inform, demonstrate, and answer critical questions.
- regional training programs to be manned by local personnel.

Rural teachers and other school personnel should be provided with:

- distance learning networks including local cable TV to bring School-to-Work to parents, teachers, and the community.

B. Enabling Policy should:

- seek to broaden student liability coverage.

7. ***Because the need for targeted School-to-Work funding at the district level to initiate and sustain School-to-Work implementation and continuation was frequently expressed along with the need for support and legislation that recognized the distinct characteristics and challenges of rural districts:***

A. Administrators should be provided with:

- guidelines for their districts to develop schoolwide School-to-Work policy that translates into an action plan.

Liaisons should be provided with:

- support of School-to-Work activities as aid continues to diminish.

Rural teachers and other school personnel should be provided with:

- continued financial support through grants, sponsors, and their own ingenuity.

B. Enabling Policy should:

- reach out to reassure the education community that their commitment to School-to-Work initiatives will continue.

IN CONCLUSION

These recommendations are the first step toward uniform and successful implementation of School-to-Work in rural schools. The next step is to use technical assistance to move this initiative forward. Considering the vast amount of School-to-Work information available and the need for a comprehensive plan of action to correctly implement it, two suggested approaches follow:

APPROACH 1

To focus on a select group of recommendations to spearhead technical assistance selection and application. Thus, aid rural areas to connect student work and learning, and to stimulate the growth of rural school programs which address the needs of nontraditional students.

For example, recommendation #5 expresses "a real need to increase knowledge of both model programs and successful services statewide and nationally." Consequently, the best model programs would be researched to assess their available technical assistance and what it could bring to rural schools including:

- Sharing regional/local workshops
- Accessing literature – resource manuals, newsletters like REAC's Rural Rapport, videos
- Doing on-site visits at schools or to model programs
- Visiting websites, e-mail addresses and other electronic gateways
- Lending mentors and other expertise
- Providing professional development
- Validating the connection between School-to-Work and academic achievement

APPROACH 2

To design a manual to explore the vast world of School-to-Work technical assistance and to learn how to use this assistance to meet the needs of individual regions and districts, customizing strategies to successfully create alignment of new information with predetermined goals.

For example, regarding recommendation #1, after following through on website exploration as directed per the manual, individual regions and districts can apply designated quality steps to

validate and then align new information. Therefore, upon learning that the GLOW School-to-Work partnership has presentation overhead materials available, district administrators seeking material for public information packets can critically review them in anticipation of enhancing their own efforts.

By investing in the best technical assistance available, work based, school based, and connecting activities can be successful in our schools. School-to-Work goals can be met and make an important contribution to the success of our rural students. Listening to the words and thoughts of some of our high school students who are participating now in School-to-Work activities, it is obvious that the possibilities can be exciting.

"

I shadowed a school psychologist at an elementary school and I learned about different types of child behavior, the emotional development of children and classroom observation. It was an excellent day that taught me a lot about child psychology, what colleges are looking for, the amount of education you need, planning your day, etc. It was a very positive experience and it strengthened my desire to enter the field of psychology.

"

Visiting the Center for the Arts allowed me to learn all about the theatre – from the backstage point of view including lighting, scenery, and sound. I want to be an actress and learning about all the things that go on besides acting makes it easier to understand theatre as a whole.

"

First of all, one of my major goals in life is to be in any field of aviation. I plan on pursuing this goal with everything within my power. For my course, I attended a sort of tour/information thing at the local airport. The man in charge was great and he gave me all the information I needed. It was great.

"

While we were at the Computer Graphics Center, we went on-line and we saw homepages created by the Center. We were allowed to try out different applications on their computers. I enjoyed it very much and I can't wait to do it in the future.

"

I enjoyed myself very much. I felt that I got an accurate picture of what being a surgeon is all about. My visit sparked my curiosity further regarding the medical field. I think that this was a great program that was very beneficial.

"

I was sent to the second grade because I would love to be a second grade teacher. I got to talk to the kids, to help them with their work and to just get a feel as to what a second grade teacher does. I loved this experience. I would love to do it again any time. I think that there should be more programs that allow students to get to know certain jobs better.

"

I went to a car garage and I helped them change oil. I learned other things about auto mechanics. It was fun. STP here I come!

"

I had a tour of the Institute and I worked in the lab making an ELISA (Enzyme Linked Immuno Suppressant Assay). I also talked with various employees there and I saw what they were doing. I weighed mice, and I looked at lung cells with graft vs. host disease. I also found out what college degrees were necessary for that field. Opinion: Great Day!

"